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PENNY GOES HUNTING

By JULIET WILSON TOMPKINS

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Penny wanted a rifle, and stood out for it with her usual independence of spirit. Her father scoffed.

"What in thunder would you shoot?" he demanded of his daughter. "If you really hit anything you would sit down and cry—girls always do. Own up, now—why do you want the thing?"

Penny wavered, then an amused smile of voluntary self-betrayal made her little pointed face, to Dudley, irresistibly expressive. She brought a picture out from a magazine and laid it before her father, leaning on his shoulder. It represented a young woman of impossible but attractive anatomy clad in a hunting suit that had the charm and distinction of a French romance; buttoned gaiters showing unstinted, a felt hat carrying a single sharp feather like an accent, a gun held dashing under one arm.

"There! I want to look just like that," said Penny with a long breath of desire and a twinkle in her eyes.

"You always want to make me happy, and it is so easy," she said plaintively.

"But see here!" Mr. Mixer stood out desperately. "Wouldn't the suit do without the gun? God knows,



Dudley Stood with Bent Head, Chilled, Hurt, Discouraged.

you're welcome to that! But a gun! My dear, among other things on this place I have a \$2,000 bull. A stray rifle ball—

"Why not a shotgun?" Dudley suggested. Penny objected so adroitly that Mr. Mixer was presently in the position of urging on his daughter the advantages of a weapon he detested as well as feared. She finally conceded that a shotgun would do if she could have it at once.

An hour later she was on her way to town to make her selection and order her suit. She had declined to try the one until the other had been sent up, a week later. Then she came proudly down the front steps for the benefit of Dudley and her father, feather and gun at exactly the dashing angle, and beamed frank satisfaction at them from a pose on the gravelled walk.

"Come on, Dud." And so volatile are a lover's spirits that this abbreviation of his name set Dudley on a prancing high horse for a day and a night.

"Don't go near the bull pasture," called Mr. Mixer after them.

"Not much!" Penny called back—a parting jab, for her father contended that no bull, properly treated, need be considered dangerous, and daily arguments on that point had left him sensitive.

Penny fired her first shot, then sat down on a log, a hand against her right shoulder, her face dubious.

"It's—very loud," she said. "Did I hit anything?"

"You will do splendidly when you learn not to shut your eyes," said Dudley, happy in the correct placing of her hand, little, sun-browned hands. "A little nearer this time. Ready?" Penny rose to a second attempt, and at a third began to show enthusiasm. By the end of an hour she could "almost hit things," as she proudly explained to her father.

"You will be glad of it yet," she told him. "Some day I may save your life!"

"H'm!" said Mr. Mixer. "I hope you lock the dogs up when you go out."

Penny's marksmanship improved so rapidly that presently she began to go out shooting by herself, a course which Dudley opposed with outward disinterestedness and inner chagrin. It seemed impossible to get any hold on this cheerful and friendly young woman, who never appeared to feel anything deeper than amusement. He began to find out from the inside the meaning of many old, familiar phrases, among them the psalmist's "sick of love." Three times he grimly mounted his horse and rode over to take his refusal and say good-by. The third time she had last been seen going off to the woods with her gun, and he set out on foot after her, determined that another sun should not go down on his misery of false hope.

He found her sitting on a stump with her gun across her knees, rage in her face; at a little distance, cowed, humble, but as determined as herself, crouched Rajah.

"That old fool won't go home!" was

her indignant greeting. "I have yelled at him, I've chased him, I've hit him,—he just looks like a Christian martyr, and won't budge. Goat!" She threw a handful of twigs at the ancient setter, who drooled apology, but did not stir. "Don't shoot to-day, walk with me instead," Dudley urged. "I want to talk to you, Penny."

"I started to shoot, and I am going to shoot," said Penny. Then her face cleared. "I tell you—you take Rajah back. He will always go with you."

Dudley stood, with hands in his coat pockets, and bent head, chilled, hurt, discouraged.

"I suppose I seem to you as tiresome and persistent as Rajah," he said, after a pause. "Perhaps he believes you really do want him, in spite of your actions. I know I have been trying to think that, though without much success. I will go, and not bother you again, if you tell me to."

Penny appeared to be considering. "I'd rather have you than Rajah," she finally decided; "but if you stay, he will. Do take him down, like a good soul."

Dudley turned and strode away, presenting a stiffened back. Rajah, reading purpose in his gait, rose and followed of his own accord, and Penny was left free to go on with her sport; but the woods sent forth no echoes.

Dudley stayed away three days. Then, after packing his belongings and making the farewell arrangements his dignity demanded, he rode over to say good-by. No one was about, so he sat on the steps in the late afternoon sunlight and waited.

Presently a shot sounded faintly from the direction of the pasture. Fifteen minutes later Penny came across the lawn, a pale Penny, walking with shaky bravado, her gun still at the sporting angle, but the arm that held it there visibly unsteady.

She smiled brightly at Dudley, then sat down on the steps as though her knees had been abruptly withdrawn.

"Had a small adventure," she said, with a laugh that was half gasp. "I've proved my point about the bull, anyway; he's a dangerous beast. Also, I have saved father's life—though he doesn't especially appreciate it."

She looked down thoughtfully at the gun across her knees, and, seeing how her hands were betraying her, thrust them behind her back.

"What happened?" Dudley asked, anxiously.

Penny looked for all the world like she'd lost her last friend.

"The bull, of course. Father would cross the pasture, just to show off, and one of the dogs had to rush in and make the bull furious. So, naturally, he charged at father—who dropped his theories and sprinted." A shudder seized her.

"You poor girl!"

"It was more like poor father." Her spirit was still persistently game, though tottering. "It looked like the proper moment for me to save his life—I had always warned him I should. I didn't want to kill the creature, just to lame him, so I aimed low. Oh, there wasn't a moment for anything, Dudley, truly. You know I shoot pretty well now, when I'm cool!"

"But did you wing the bull?" Dudley asked excitedly. Her lip quivered.

"No; I—I winged father!"

"What?"

She burst into tears.

"Just across his knee—it really wasn't anything. And it did save his life. For it scared him so much worse than the bull, he jumped way to one side, and the least charged right past—over the very spot! And so he had time to double round a tree and get over the fence. I did save his life. But he wasn't grateful. It's the end of shooting for me!"

"You poor child! But where is he?" he asked.

"The cart came by and he got in to go down to the doctor. Dudley, for once I have made my father too angry," she said, solemnly. "I'm—I'm frightened to death!"

"You only grazed him?" His arm was about her unrebuked.

"Oh, yes—but he's all the madder. If only something awful enough to divert him would happen before he gets back!"

"Can't we find something?" A smile began to struggle through her dismay.

"I know one thing that might."

"What, Penny?"

"You say it."

"But I am not clever enough; I can't think."

"Well—don't you think the—the prospect of—losing his only daughter?" she stopped abruptly.

"Penny!"

"Not that I'd ever really leave him," she amended when she was allowed to emerge. "Who takes me takes him."

"Yes, dear girl."

"And then, you see, having frightened him to meekness, we can comfort him with that." She no longer pulled away from him.

She would not look at him, and in her voice there was nothing deeper than amusement.

"Penny, are you taking me only because you are afraid to face your father?" he asked gravely.

"Um h'm," she assented. He drew her closer.

"Penny, are you?"

"Yes."

"Penny, are you?"

His eyes were insistent. She tried to meet them with defiance, but suddenly a tide of red swept over the little, pointed face, a quick, singeing, glorious color that left her no defenses—the first real blush of her life. She broke away from him, covering her face with her hands.

"Go away! I hate you!" she cried. But Dudley laughed from the very depths of a contented heart; he was happy.

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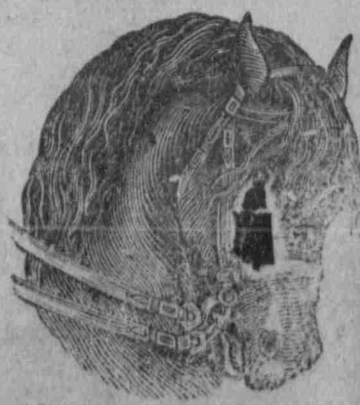
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